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No. 3. April, 1921.

WALKER'S QUARTERLY

CHARLES BENTLEY

MEMBER OF THE "OLD WATER-COLOUR" SOCIETY

BY

F. GORDON ROE

(Author of "Henry Bright, of the Norwich School")

BY APPOINTMENT

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Charles Bentley

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By F. GORDON ROE

AT the commencement of last century Tottenham Court Road presented a very different aspect from the busy thoroughfare now linking the Hampstead Road to Oxford Street. There was hardly a building of any architectural pretensions in the vicinity —the British Museum was still plain Montague House—and such dwellings as there were abutted on all manner of rural backwaters, from the famous Field of the Forty Footsteps to the dismal haunts described by Dickens in the 44th chapter of "Barnaby Rudge." There were persons alive in 1832 who recalled a time when "the last house in London was the public-house in the corner, by Whitefield's Chapel": itself the most important feature of the highway. With the waxing of the century, however, Tottenham Court Road assumed a new importance. No later than 1838, a gloriously involved sentence in Tallis's "London Street Views"

remarked that the road "which, twenty-five years back, was almost the least business thoroughfare, *is now*, equal to, and there is as much retail trade done in it, than in any other street in the Metropolis."

It was in this highway, during 1805 or 1806, that the wife of a master-carpenter and builder, called Bentley, gave birth to a son, who received the name of Charles. The latter date is favoured in most reference books; but both Messrs. J. L. Roget* and C. E. Hughes† possessed sufficient caution to qualify the statement; whereas, Mr. Gilbert R. Redgrave‡ plumped boldly for the year of Trafalgar. In either case, it is interesting to note that the "Old Water-Colour" Society and its future member were born within two years of each other.

Only the most meagre details of Charles Bentley's youth are ascertainable, and those are mostly the fruits of reconstruction. It can be conjectured, for instance, that the bursting of Meux's great vat in 1814, and the consequent deluging of Tottenham Court Road and Oxford Street, impressed his boyish imagination. On

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* "A History of the 'Old Water-Colour Society,'" by John Lewis Roget (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1891); Vol. 2, p. 238.

† "Early English Water-Colour," by C. E. Hughes (London; Methuen & Co., Ltd.), p. 162.

‡ "A History of Water-Colour Painting in England," by Gilbert R. Redgrave (London: Sampson, Low, 1892), p. 201.

Size 10½ × 7 ins.

the other hand, it is certain that, in common with so many other talented painters, he had displayed an early affection for art. Mr. Roget, quoting from the Joseph John Jenkins MSS.,* cites the testimony of Bentley's mother as to this. He had "shown from his earliest days a taste for drawing," in consequence of which he was placed with Mr. Fielding to colour prints." This was Copley Fielding's brother, Theodore Henry Adolphus (1781-1851), to whom Bentley was eventually apprenticed in order to learn aquatinting. Whilst thus bound, "he went to Paris to do a work Mr. F. had there"—probably an "Excursion sur les Côtes et dans les Ports de Normandie" (Paris, 1823-5). Bentley's name does not occur on any of the plates, most of which are after Bonington, but those of Thales and Newton Smith Fielding are liberally represented, so it is quite possible that he assisted in the production. (Mr. H. M. Cundall states, by the way, in his "History of British Water-Colour Painting," published by John Murray, 1894, that Bentley was "articled to Theodore and Thales Fielding.")

About this time, Bentley formed a life-long friendship with William Callow. Born in 1812, Callow commenced print-colouring and aqua-

* "A History of the 'Old Water-Colour Society,'" by John Lewis Roget (London : Longmans, Green & Co., 1891) ; Vol. 2, p. 238.

tinting under Theodore Fielding in 1823 at 26, Newman Street, Oxford Street, where he worked from 8 a.m. till 6 p.m. daily.* When Fielding removed to Kentish Town in 1825, Callow "was articled to him as a pupil for eight years for instruction in water-colour drawing and in aquatint engraving. . . . . There were two other pupils, Charles Bentley and John Edge,"† both of whom assisted Callow to master the technical side of his calling. It was Bentley, indeed, who gave him his first painting lesson, and encouraged the growth of his "natural talents."‡

These early reminiscences of Callow's are of the utmost importance, not only in determining the period of Bentley's articles, which expired in 1827, but also in proving that painting was already receiving his serious attention. To what extent Bentley prosecuted his study of water-colour technique during the next five years can only be surmised. He did not immediately sever his old connection, however, but supported himself to some degree by engraving or designing plates for periodicals. Roget mentions several, chiefly in works of the

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* "William Callow, R.W.S., F.R.G.S. An Autobiography." Edited by H. M. Cundall, I.S.O., F.S.A. (London: A. & C. Black, 1908), p. 3.

† Ibid, p. 4.

‡ Ibid, p. 5.

Size 25 × 13 ins.

TREPORT

"Keepsake" order, but the value of the list is vitiated by a confusion of identities. Thus, the name "J. C. Bentley" appearing on certain plates is implied to be an engraver's error. One prefers to see in it, however, the mark of another painter-graver, Joseph Clayton Bentley (1809-1851), whose style was not entirely dissimilar to his namesake's.

With 1832, the misty annals of Charles Bentley's early life begin to be supplanted by indisputable facts. He is discovered as the author of four drawings at the New Society of Painters in Water-Colours'* 1st Exhibition; which were followed by six in the succeeding show. He was then installed at 15, Bateman's Buildings, a narrow turning still to be found on the south side of Soho Square, where he remained for another six years. Only two of these were devoted to securing the "New Society's" approbation, however, since on February 10th, 1834, Bentley was elected an Associate-Exhibitor of the "Old Water-Colour" Society.† His initial contribution to the latter consisted of five drawings; followed by a like number in 1835; three in 1836; and three in 1837. By 1838 he had removed to 11, Mornington Place, Hampstead Road, which, saving for a

* Now the Royal Institute of Painters in Water-Colours.

† Now the Royal Society of Painters in Water-Colours.

three-year hiatus, remained his home till the last. Notable amongst his 1838 exhibits were two imaginative compositions: "From the Red Rover" and "From Tom Cringle's Log," respectively representing a naval engagement and a sinking slaver. The long and lurid quotations attached to these in the catalogue are omitted in the list at the end of this memoir.

From 1838 to 1841, Bentley's annual total at the "Old Water-Colour" Society remained steadily at six items; in 1842 and 1843, it was increased to eight. The catalogues for the last-named year (the first in which he was "hung" at the British Institution), locate him at 20, Charlotte Street, Portland Place, which he shared with Callow until the latter's marriage. January 12th, 1843, witnessed his elevation to full membership of the "Old Society," which was duly noted in the 1844 catalogue. He then exhibited ten water-colours; but, in 1845, he reached his record by sending sixteen works—a record only to be repeated in his last year, although those intervening never saw less than a dozen drawings hung at the Society's rooms.

In 1846, Bentley was back at 11, Mornington Place, working hard, and with but eight more years to live. He thrust out a fresh feeler in 1851, by sending to the (Royal) Society of

Size 17 × 11¼ ins.

British Artists, but did not contribute more than three works all told to the Suffolk Street Exhibition. It is sad to find that years of toil never brought a competence to him. "He was uncertain in his transactions, and always poor," wrote Samuel Redgrave in a sentence that could serve as epitaph for all too many men of talent.

"Always poor!" Long after his death, a drawing by Bentley "appeared in one of the public sale-rooms . . . attributed to Turner, under whose name it had, I believe, enjoyed a brief span of high-priced honour."*

One of the saddest associations in the long history of art is embodied in the constantly recurrent phrase, "always poor." It is awful merely to attempt to realise how many brilliant exponents have been, are, and must be numbered in that category.

Bentley practically died in harness. Having contracted cholera, he expired after a very brief illness on September 4th, 1854. Administration of his effects, which were sworn as not exceeding £300, was granted (20th September, 1854) to his widow, Eliza.

"The prevailing epidemic," said the "Art Journal" (1854), "has carried off one of the most valuable of the members of the Old

*Mr. C. E. Hughes; Op. Cit., p. 163.

Water-Colour Society, Mr. Charles Bentley, whose pictures of marine subjects were among the most attractive works in the annual exhibitions of that institution. Mr. Bentley, whose age was not more than 48, died after a few hours' illness on the 4th September."

The "Athenæum's" obituary (September 9th, 1854) was no less commendatory: "The Old Water-Colour Society has just lost a valuable member in Mr. Charles Bentley—and lost him before his time, since the papers announce his age to have been 48. In marine landscapes and other subjects of the kind he may be ranked between Messrs. Copley Fielding and Callow."

The range of Bentley's sketching excursions can be gathered to some extent from the subjects which he painted. He seems to have travelled fairly freely in England; very much less so in Scotland; to have made trips to North and South Wales; and to have had some acquaintance with Jersey and the North of Ireland. The picturesque atmosphere of Normandy made a special appeal to him, which he answered on several occasions. Thanks to Mr. Cundall's scholarly editorship of Callow's autobiography (to which I have previously alluded), it is possible to date four such visits with exactitude. Bentley, Callow

and Edge met together, for the first time since their pupilage in Paris, during the autumn of 1836; and the two former, with Outhwaite, the engraver, visited Rouen and Havre, "making sketches by the way."* Other trips to Paris with Callow took place in 1840 and 1841;† and the pair also went to St. Malo, Avranches, Caen, Dieppe and Abbeville on the latter occasion.‡

The drawings of Venice, Holland and Dusseldorf which made spasmodic appearances at the "Old Water-Colour" Society need not necessarily be accepted as evidence that Bentley had ever travelled so far afield. Such, at any rate, was Mr. Roget's opinion, with which, in the absence of contrary data, I am disposed to agree. It is obvious that Bentley could not afford to ignore the commercial aspect of his profession, and there is ample proof that he sometimes worked up sketches by less skilled hands. The "Old Society's" exhibitions of 1841 and 1849 contained views in Trebizond and Abydos which were frankly admitted to have been executed after studies by "Coke Smyth, Esq."; and yet

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*"William Callow, R.W.S., F.R.G.S. An Autobiography." Edited by H. M. Cundall, I.S.O., F.S.A. p. 62.

†Ibid, p. 74.

‡Ibid, p. 86.

another example of this bread-winning craft is to be found in a work by Sir R. Schomburgk, "12 Views in the Interior of Guiana." published by subscription in 1841 (Ackermann, Strand). The sketches for these records "of an investigatory Tour of Guiana, under the direction of the London Royal Geographical Society and Her Majesty's Government," were made by Mr. John Morison, who went as draughtsman, but "the artist's finish, the effect of colouring, light and shade, were communicated . . . by Mr. Charles Bentley, whose drawings in water-colours have long been esteemed."

Although Bentley did not visit all the places he utilized as subjects, and was obliged to accept commissions for what can only be regarded as hack-work, his true merit was apparent to others than the brother-brushes who elected him to the "Old Society." Nagler's "Künstler-Lexicon" contains one of the first serious appreciations of his work that can be found, and is doubly interesting from the fact that it was written only three years after Bentley's début as an aquarellist. It describes him as "a leading London water-colour artist, now alive (1835), who serves a special purpose among those Englishmen who practise this form of art. He paints splendid views, which leave nothing to be desired in the tone and strength

Size 26 × 19 ins.

MOUNT ST. MICHAEL

of the colours. His water-colours are thus greatly sought after by lovers of art, and are only to be found in first-class cabinets." It is to be feared, however, that he got more praise than pence. Samuel Redgrave hints that Bentley was exploited by persons possessing more regard for their own than the artist's pocket. In an artistic profession, recognition and riches are not synonymous.

It is unnecessary to add much to Nagler's criticism quoted above. Bentley's interests were centred in scenes on and off shore, and though he did not entirely confine himself to their portrayal, it is with them that his name is most readily connected by present-day collectors. A keen colour-sense and adroit control over his medium combined to give his style a cachet which holds its own against the work of many better-known contemporaries.

In compiling the present account of Charles Bentley's life, I have had resource to a large number of books in addition to those to which I have already acknowledged indebtedness. My principal guide to clues, however, has remained in Mr. Roget's well-known and valuable work, but even here are one or two passages calling for comment. In the first place, we are told that Bentley exhibited nowhere before his election to an associateship

of the "Old Society." As a matter of fact, he had been represented for the previous two years at the opposition show in Old Bond Street (where it was then situated). So much can be gathered from the text, but it remains to be noted that Mr. Roget's total of works exhibited by Bentley at the Old Water-Colour Society is 197. Mr. Algernon Graves, on the other hand, allows 209, a figure precisely agreeing with my own independent enumeration. The difference is too heavy to be ignored, but may possibly be traced to some "telescoping" of titles. Bentley's titles were not distinguished by diversity, and this detail, aggravated by two misprints corrupting the artist's initial into "S" and "A," may have had some share in promoting confusion.

Although of purely academic interest in themselves, it is necessary to note such objections in the case of one whose genius has failed to preserve his history from forgetfulness.

Works Exhibited in London by Charles Bentley.

(The arrangement of works in each year is dictated solely by convenience, and bears no necessary relation to their comparative importance. Several obvious misprints in the original catalogues are here corrected.)

New Society of Painters in Water-Colours.

1832 View in the Highlands
View near Dunkirk
Coast Scene
Near Lichfield

1833 Windmill in Devonshire
St. Michael's Mount, Cornwall
Scene in Derbyshire
Isle of Wight
River Dart, Devon
Near Lichfield

Old Society of Painters in Water-Colours.

1834 Scarborough, Yorkshire
" "
Coast Scene
Wreck on the Coast of Skegness, Lincolnshire
Church of Santa Salute, Venice

1835 On the Thames—Battersea
View from the Promenade, Venice
Skegness, on the Coast of Lincolnshire
View on the Dart
Portsmouth

Old Society of Painters in Water-Colours.

1836 Dunluce Castle, Loch of Antrim
Near Bonchurch, Isle of Wight
Near Lichfield

1837 The Raft (*S.* Bentley in catalogue)
On the Coast, Lincolnshire
Kingswear, on the Dart, Devon
1838 Innisfallen Island, Lower Lake, Killarney
Dunluce Castle, County of Antrim
Sligo, Ireland
From the Red Rover
From Tom Cringle's Log
The Lower Lake, Killarney
1839 Garden Scene
Ferry Boat
Off Dieppe (*A.* Bentley in catalogue)
Wicklow Bay, Ireland
Tenby, South Wales
Tenby Bay, Wales
1840 On the Beach near Dover, looking towards Folkestone
Entrance to Sligo Harbour, Ireland
Santa Salute, from the Piazzetta, Venice
Ferry Boat
Near Penzance, coast of Cornwall
Needles, Isle of Wight
1841 Trebizond, Black Sea; the lower range of the Caucasus—after a sketch by Coke Smyth, Esq.
Lock Scene
Abydos, Dardanelles—from a sketch by Coke Smyth, Esq.
Fishing Boats, Wicklow Bay, Ireland
Donegal Bay — Killybegs Mountains in the distance—Ireland
Fishing Boats running into Harbour in a stiff breeze
1842 Fécamp Coast, Normandy
Avranches, Normandy
Tréport, Coast of Normandy

Size 13 × $7\frac{7}{8}$ ins.

Pier at Broadstairs, Fishing Boat running in—Early Morning
Northfleet, on the Thames
Scene near Munthorpe, Lincolnshire
Oyster Women on the Coast at Granville
Hay Barge off the Nore

1843 Brig and Fishing Boats off St. Valery, Coast of Normandy
Tréport, Coast of Normandy
Granville, Coast of Normandy
Scene in the Mountains near Tal-y-Bont, Wales
Vale of Llanrwst, from Roe, North Wales
Hay Barges, etc.—Mouth of the Medway
Pont Hugon (? Pont Wgan), on the River Roe, North Wales
Tenby, South Wales

British Institution.

Water-Mill on the Roe, North Wales. 3′10″ × 3′3″

Old Society of Painters in Water-Colours.

1844 Spithead—Seventy-four firing a salute on leaving port
Dutch Boats off the Coast of Holland
On the Thames—an Indiaman being towed up—Early Morning
Town and Castle of Dieppe, from the sea
Mont St. Michel, Coast of Normandy—Early Morning
Portmadoc, North Wales—Storm clearing off
Dieppe Pier—Fishing Boats going out
Making Signals for a Pilot off St. Malo
Fishing Boats running into Harbour
Near Burgh, Fens of Lincolnshire

1845 Tremadoc, North Wales

Collier on a Sand-bank, off Leigh, on the Thames

Wreck on the Rocks off Elizabeth Castle, Jersey

East Keal, Lincolnshire

Quillebœuf, on the Seine

An Indiaman lying-to—Making Signals for a Pilot

Fishing Boats off Leigh, on the Thames

Ballyshannon, Donegal, North of Ireland

Granville—Coast of Normandy

Salmon Trap, on the River Lledr, Pass of Dolwyddelen, North Wales

Broadstairs—an Indiaman in distress: Boat going out to her assistance

Cardigan Bay, North Wales

Near Festiniog, North Wales

Alton, Lincolnshire—Storm clearing off

Haymaking, Tetford, Lincolnshire

Traeth Mawr—Range of Mountains, Snowdon, etc., from Tremadoc

British Institution.

Dutch Boat, etc., off Ostend. 3′ 2″ × 4′ 4″

1846 In the Pool, Thames—Greenwich in the distance

Broadstairs—Fishing Boats preparing for sea. 3′ 0″ × 4′ 3″

Old Society of Painters in Water-Colours.

Lock Scene, near Boston, Lincolnshire

Wreck on the Rocks, Dunluce Castle, North Ireland

Fishing Boats off Granville, coast of Normandy

Leigh, on the Thames—Sunset

In the Downs—Deal in the distance

On the Medway

Pilot Boat—Folkestone in the distance
Near Penmachno, North Wales
Granville, Coast of Normandy
Dusseldorf, on the Rhine
On the Coast, Southend
Mountain Scene, from Portmadoc, North Wales
Wreck on the Sands, Criccieth Castle, Cardigan Bay

1847 Scene in the Bay of Cardigan—Criccieth Castle
Fresh Breeze—off Whitby, Coast of Yorkshire
Fishing Boats off St. Malo
Bay, Donegal, Killybegs Mountains, North of Ireland
Scene in the Downs—Dover in the distance
Corn Field, near the Pass of Llanberis, North Wales
Ferry Boat—Storm clearing off
Fishing Boats preparing for Sea
Sea Piece—Coast of North Wales
On the Coast—Normandy, near Tréport
Tattershall Castle, Lincolnshire—Evening
On the Coast, near Tremadoc, North Wales
Dover Castle
Elizabeth Castle, Jersey—Sunset
On the Coast, Southend—Boat running on shore

1848 Haymaking—Tattershall Castle, Lincolnshire
Criccieth Castle, Cardigan Bay, North Wales
Edinburgh, from the Sea
Quillebœuf, looking up the Seine
Landguard Fort, Harwich in the distance
Near Burntisland, Coast of Fifeshire
On the Essex Coast, near Harwich
Harwich, from the River Stour
St. Michael's Mount, Coast of Cornwall

Killybegs Mountains, Donegal Bay

On the Coast of Normandy

Scarborough, from the Sea

An Old Breakwater on the Coast, Essex

Fishing Boats running into Harbour—Storm coming on

Near Coningsby, Lincolnshire

British Institution.

St. Malo, from the Sea—Fishing Boats. 3′1″ × 4′4″

1849 Harwich, from the Stour. 4′0″ × 5′7″

Old Society of Painters in Water-Colours.

Town and Harbour of Sligo, Ireland

On the River Stour—Harwich in the distance

Tattershall Castle, Lincolnshire—Sunset after a Storm

Lower Lake, Killarney, Ireland

Tréport, Coast of Normandy

Bantry Bay, Ireland—Storm clearing off

Mountain Scene, near Sligo, Ireland

Mont St. Michel, Normandy

Kirkcaldy, Coast of Fife

Trebizond—Distant range of the Caucasus—after a sketch by Coke Smyth, Esq.

Mountain Scene from Portmadoc, North Wales

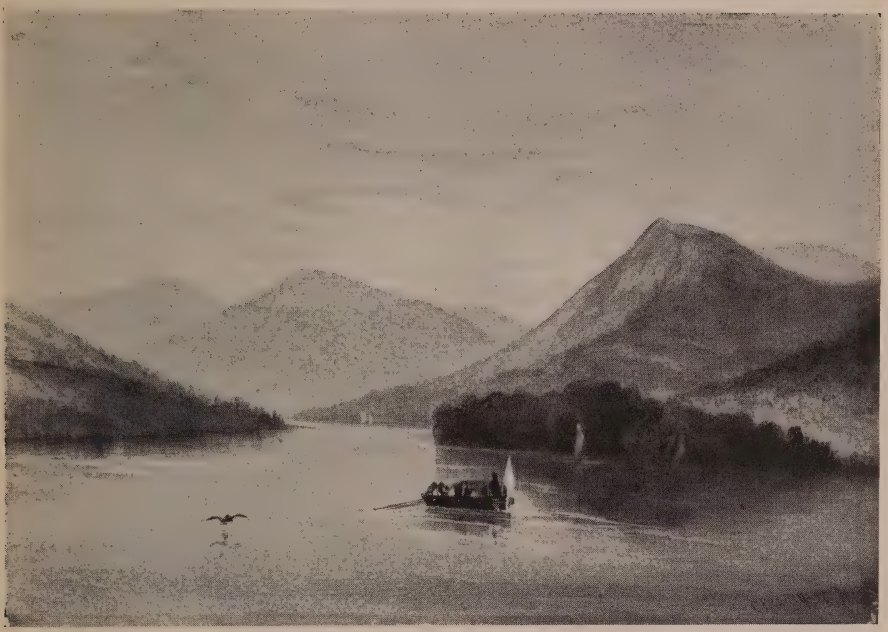
Off the Dutch Coast

1850 Men-of-war in the Medway—Sheerness in the distance

Mountain Scene, on the River Roe, North Wales

Mountain Scene, Snowdon—taken from Tremadoc

Vessel on the Rocks—Scarborough in the distance



Size $10\frac{3}{4} \times 7\frac{1}{2}$ ins.

Wreck on the Coast of North Wales—Criccieth Castle

Burntisland, Coast of Fifeshire, Scotland

Dunluce Castle, North of Ireland

The Town and Harbour of Sligo, Ireland

Mountain Scene, near Glengariff, Ireland

Fishing Boats running into Harbour

On the Yorkshire Coast, near Scarborough

St. Catherine Rock, near Tenby, South Wales

Fishing Boats off the Coast of Normandy

On the Medway

British Institution.

Edinburgh, from Inchkeith Island. 3′ 9″ × 5′ 7″

1851 On the Medway—Sheerness in the distance. 4′ 1″ × 3′ 10″

Society of British Artists.

An Indiaman lying-to, making signals for a Pilot, off Dover

Old Society of Painters in Water-Colours.

Sunset—on the Thames, near Limehouse

Tenby, South Wales

Irish Peasants returning from market—Killybegs Mountains, Coast of Donegal, Ireland

Coast of Cardigan, near Portmadoc, North Wales

Fishing Boats pushing off—Holy Island, Coast of Northumberland

Fishing Boats running into Harbour

Mont St. Michel, Normandy

Portobello, looking towards Edinburgh

Burntisland, Coast of Fifeshire

Wreck off Bamborough Castle, Coast of Northumberland

Wicklow Bay, Ireland

Fishing Boats off the Coast of Sheerness

Mountain Scene, near Bettws-y-Coed, North Wales

Fishing Boats off St. Valery-en-Caux, Coast of Normandy

Scarborough Coast, Yorkshire

1852 Mountain Scene, near Roe, North Wales—Evening

Scene in the Highlands

Cærnarvon Castle—Sunset

South Foreland—near Dover

Dover, from the Channel

Broadstairs

Summer Afternoon, on the Thames, near Erith

Granville, Coast of Normandy

Elizabeth Castle, Jersey—Sunset after a Storm

Tremadoc, North Wales

Fishing Boats

Scarborough, Coast of Yorkshire

On the Lledr, near Bettws-y-Coed

Society of British Artists.

Burntisland, from the Firth of Forth

British Institution.

Fish Girls on the Coast of Normandy. 4′ 0″ × 3′ 11″

1853 Elizabeth Castle, Jersey—Sunset after a Storm 20 guineas

Old Society of Painters in Water-Colours.

Sligo, Ireland

Fishing Boats off Ramsgate

Mountain Scene, near Bettws-y-Coed, North Wales

Dunluce Castle, Ireland—Sunset after a Storm

On the Coast of Fifeshire, Scotland
Coast Scene, near Harwich
Old Pier at Broadstairs
Mountain Scene, Donegal Bay, Ireland
Elizabeth Castle, Jersey—Storm clearing off
Mountain Scene, near Portmadoc, North Wales
Fishing Boat, near Southend
Vale of Dolwyddelen, North Wales
Cardigan Bay, North Wales
Sea Piece

1854 Composition—Evening
Scarborough
Looking up the River from Southend
Tattershall Castle, Lincolnshire—Sunset after a Storm
The Dogana, Venice
South Foreland—Dover in the distance
Tintern Abbey
Ballyshannon Bay, Ireland
Wicklow Bay, Ireland
Sea Piece
Hastings, from the Sea
Street Scene—Verona
Torquay, Devonshire
Bantry Bay, Ireland
Portmadoc, North Wales
Burntisland, Coast of Fifeshire

British Institution.

Donegal Bay—Mist clearing off from the Killybegs Mountains, Ireland. 80 guineas

Society of British Artists.

Fishing Boats off Quillebœuf, Mouth of the Seine

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